

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: TOURISM

DATE: April 28, 2010

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS MERLINO
 KENNY
 BELDEN
 STRAINER
 GOODSPEED
 MCCOY
 CONOVER

OTHERS PRESENT:

REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:
 KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR
 PETER GIRARD, CREATIVE DIRECTOR
 TANYA BRAND, GROUP TOUR PROMOTER
 LEISA GRANT, PRINCIPAL ACCOUNT CLERK
NICOLE LIVINGSTON, DEPUTY CLERK OF THE BOARD
SUPERVISOR TAYLOR
LUISA CRAIGE-SHERMAN, WARREN COUNTY COUNCIL OF
 CHAMBERS
TOM CONNORS, AD WORKSHOP
ANDREW GOTTEHRER, AREA SENIOR SALES MANAGER FOR
 INTERSTATE HOTELS & RESORTS CO.
ALICE GREETHER, CITY OF GLENS FALLS
DON LEHMAN, *THE POST STAR*
THOM RANDALL, *ADIRONDACK JOURNAL*
TONY HALL, *THE LAKE GEORGE MIRROR*
JOANNE COLLINS, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Mr. Merlino called the meeting of the Tourism Committee to order at 10:00 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Belden, seconded by Mr. McCoy and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the March 26, 2010 Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Kate Johnson, Director of the Tourism Department, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Johnson presented a request to transfer funds in the amount of \$42 for the purchase of a memory module for her computer. Office equipment, she noted, was not authorized as a budget item.

Motion was made by Mr. Belden, seconded by Mr. McCoy and carried unanimously to approve the request to transfer funds as outlined above and to refer same to the Finance Committee. A copy of the request for Transfer of Funds is on file with the minutes.

Addressing the internal budget, Leisa Grant, Principal Account Clerk, stated that matching funds would not likely be received from New York State and she recommended that the portion that was typically paid from Occupancy Tax receipts which totaled \$72,000, remain in the budget to support the Adirondack Regional

Tourism Council's marketing programs for which the Warren County Tourism Department typically participated. Ms. Grant noted that the total amount of \$144,000 was included in the budget. She explained that the budget would be reduced by \$54,803 via budget reductions, such as attrition which included fringe, and the possible non-renewal of the contract for photography services. Ms. Johnson noted that the Adirondack region relied heavily on both the Matching Funds, as well as County dollars and she recommended that the unmatched amount of \$72,000 remain in the budget, for which a budget amendment would be initiated following the receipt of the written award notice. It was consensus of the Committee to allow \$72,000 to be allocated from 2009 Occupancy Tax receipts to remain in the budget with expenses itemized as outlined on the attached report.

The next part of the request, Ms. Grant stated, pertained to \$826,000 in Occupancy Tax Collections distributed to the Towns in October of 2009 for which there was an \$89,170 surplus which had not been included in the Tourism budget. Alternatively, she said, there was a net shortfall of \$34,400 in benefits due to the fact that the Tourism Department was asked to pay fringe expenses normally paid by the Treasurer's Office. Ms. Grant presented a request to transfer funds in the amount of \$34,400, from Code No. A.6417 469 - Tourism - Other Payments/Contributions, to Hospitalization and Dental Insurance Codes as itemized on the attached request. Mr. Merlino noted the reserve balance of \$54,770.

Motion was made by Mr. Belden, seconded by Mr. Kenny and carried unanimously to approve the request for a transfer of funds in the amount of \$34,400 as outlined above and to refer same to the Finance Committee. *A copy of the request for Transfer of Funds is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Johnson referenced the 2009 Warren County Tourism Annual Review binder which was compiled by the Department and contained comprehensive information relative to marketing, media schedules, advertisements, various statistical and demographic data, and all Tourism related functions, a copy of which is on file with the minutes. She pointed out that the 2009 Occupancy Tax annual report had not yet been completed. A copy of the binder, she stated, was maintained in her Office.

Ms. Johnson reported that the winter conversion survey was recently completed, whereby viewers signed up for specific programs via email. She stated that for those that went online for the winter give-away, 2,917 surveys were sent and a total of 577 surveys (19.8 %) were returned. Concurrently, Peter Girard, Creative Director, reviewed a three-year winter give-a-way data sheet via powerpoint; 33.62% of visitors were converted, 33.4% had not visited between December 1 and March 31; 57.5% of those that had not visited stated that they did not vacation during that time period and 31.8% indicated that they would visit on a future date. Ms. Johnson summarized the details of the report which included percentages for those who would visit in the future, reasons for not traveling which were primarily due to health and financial reasons, other specific destinations selected, preferred seasons, average stay, average family size, number of children, household income, education level, spending habits and more. Popular activities, she said, were listed as dining, scenic touring, nature, shopping, winter carnival and winter sports. She noted that the Town and Village of

Lake George, the City of Glens Falls, and the Town of Queensbury were at the top of the list of towns, cities and villages most visited. She reported that when asked to rate the overall quality of the vacation the results were as follows: 0% poor or fair, 14% good, 43% very good, and 42% excellent. She stated that 44% rated Customer Service as very good and 100% would recommend the area to family and friends. She noted that a press release would be sent which reflected the details of the abovementioned data and copies of the report were available in her Office.

Continuing, Ms. Johnson apprised that the summer coupon book, which offered over \$1,600 in savings, had been distributed and was also available on line. She noted that for the businesses which provided a website address, a live link to their website was available. She stated that the 2010 Rates and Dates color brochure had been distributed and she commended Ellen Himmelblau, Senior Tourism Specialist, for her hard work in maintaining the database of approximately 900 events and activities.

Ms. Johnson addressed the Adirondack Attractions Campaign, which included Santa's Workshop, High Falls Gorge and Ausable Chasm. She noted that representatives from each attraction came together to discuss possibilities for a business revival. She stated that the Lake George Steamboat Company, Fort William Henry Resort, and Natural Stone Bridge and Caves had also expressed interest in the advertising campaign which might include a rack card, promotional buttons, and email blasts.

Ms. Johnson reported that she had met with representatives from ConsultEcon, Inc., a consulting service through the Warren County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and she apprised that she had provided the information needed relative to the survey already underway. Pertaining to recent press coverage, Ms. Johnson cited a recent article in the *New York Times* entitled "Escaping the Crowds", where Lake George was mentioned and the Town of Bolton received especially favorable coverage. She reported that the New York State Division of Tourism had cancelled the May workshop and terminated both their ad agency and public relations firm. Unfortunately, she said, there was no marketing plan and the leadership provided by the State Division of Tourism had ceased. Ms. Johnson noted that she would keep the Committee apprised of further developments.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Tanya Brand, Group Tour Promoter, who reported that she had attended a webinar on April 9, 2010, to learn more about GroupConnect.com, a web portal collaboratively designed to represent the interest of the members of the American Bus Association (ABA) and the Ontario Motor Coach Association (OMCA). Ms. Brand noted that membership organizations included Tour Operators and the website presented the opportunity to become a client on the portal which provided networking opportunities for travel suppliers and had access to Warren County's profile. The most important of the six components of GroupConnect, according to Ms. Brand, was the e-Market component where businesses and municipalities could convene to do business and gather information about various destinations.

With regard to the ABA's list of the top 100 destinations for 2011, Ms. Brand noted that she had submitted Warrensburg's World Largest Garage Sale and the Adirondack

Balloon Festival for the first and second nominations, respectively. Events that are added to the list, she said, received worldwide media attention. She further noted that as a Destination Management Organization member of the ABA there was an opportunity to submit a third nomination for which she would consider the Lake George Jazz Festival.

On behalf of the I Love New York (ILNY) ABA/OMCA Tour Operator Summit to take place in March of 2011, Ms. Brand stated that a Request for Proposal (RFP) had been distributed to local hoteliers who could meet the specific needs for the event.

Ms. Brand reported that the 2012 Model-T Ford Event had selected Rutland, Vermont as their location due to budget restraints relative to hotel costs. Pertaining to local business, she reported that she attended a meeting with the Lake George Chamber of Commerce regarding the Empire State Society of Association Executives (ESSAE) Show to be held in Saratoga, NY in June. She noted that the display would reflect a unified approach and include the Lake George Steamboat Company, Fort William Henry Resort, the Sagamore Resort, the Queensbury Hotel and the Great Escape Lodge. She further noted that the Lake George Chamber of Commerce would act as a second delegate and work in the Warren County Tourism booth along with Michael Consuelo, Special Events Coordinator.

Addressing confirmed events, Ms. Brand informed that a souvenir lapel pin had been designed for the Velo Quebec Grand Tour and the production work was awarded to Adirondack Ad Specialties in Glens Falls. She informed that pins would be given to all cyclists who provided their contact information at the tourism booth at Adirondack Community College (ACC). Ms. Brand expounded that a welcome brochure would be distributed by Velo Quebec to cyclists prior to their arrival at ACC which would convey pertinent event details and information. She added that other projects relative to the ACC event were underway, such as the production of welcome banners and the possibility of offering tethered hot air balloon rides. Ms. Brand informed that Grand Tour maps from Velo Quebec were available in her Office.

Concluding the Group Tours portion of the meeting, Ms. Brand summarized recent and upcoming shows which were outlined in her agenda. She reported that as a result of an RFP distributed by the Tourism Office, the Sagamore Resort had booked the Adventist Care Center Presidents' Council Retreat to be held in August of 2010 and included 50 rooms for 5 nights and 100 attendees from Florida.

Responding to an inquiry from Mr. McCoy, Ms. Brand stated that between 400 and 500 attendees had been expected for the Model T Show. She informed that their budget for room rates was between \$95 and \$100 and included many special requirements, such as parking and space to conduct seminars. She thanked those that worked hard on proposals and she noted that although the Roaring Brook Ranch had offered a competitive rate, unfortunately, they could not accommodate all of their meeting requirements. Ms. Johnson apprised that much time and thought had been dedicated

to the effort to identify a facility in the Lake George region.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Mr. Girard who stated that two email blasts were sent to approximately 102,000 recipients in April. He reported that the camping contest email blast was opened by 12,500 people, with a click-through rate of 26%. Pertaining to the travel deals and travel with pets blasts, he said, approximately 13,000 opened the email within five days with a click-through rate of 21%. Mr. Girard expressed appreciation to Bill Mahar and the Information Technology Department for their assistance to ensure that emails from the blasts arrived at their intended destination. He explained that there was not a standard protocol for the various email browsers and Mr. Mahar was able to fine tune the process in a manner to ensure improved integrity of email submissions and reduced spam rates. Ms. Johnson expounded that the email blasts had previously been released within a 24 hour period, and Mr. Mahar had implemented a method of creating email batches which were sent over a period of several days, thereby improving transmission integrity.

Mr. Girard apprised that the Warren County Tourism website was now available, and was set up for integration into Facebook, a social media website. He reported that 1,000 subscribers had been accumulated, with an average accumulation rate of 50 per week. He said the site included weekly interaction and promotions, such as coupons and packages. He noted that comments, reviews and pictures could be posted to the site for review by other prospective visitors. Mr. Conover praised the use of the aforementioned technological capabilities which effectively introduced the region to the world; the effectiveness of web surveys for retailers; and the internet as a vehicle for reaching broad populations. He also noted the importance of the wording of survey questions in a manner to derive the most valid results. Ms. Johnson pointed out that the survey data and the link to the electronic newsletter was included in the Adirondack Regional Chamber of Commerce newsletter.

Ms. Johnson introduced Tom Connors with Ad Workshop, who handled Warren County's media advisement, provided consulting services, and handled television media buying for Warren County. Mr. Connors stated the main purpose of his work was to obtain the most exposure possible for the Lake George area and to build the database of subscribers. He apprised of new technology which included the Tourism Department's ads which were run on Cablevision and New York (NY) Interconnect and enabled viewers to request travel packages via a banner at the bottom of the screen. He noted that the Lake George ad reached 3.3 million households and 10,300 viewed the one minute video. He further noted that the ad began on January 1, 2010 and Lake George was the first to run for the entire State of New York. Mr. Girard also noted that they guaranteed the last commercial spot in each pod, which would ensure that the entire commercial would run each time.

Mr. Connors stated that the review of potential markets indicated a possible growth trend in travelers coming from the Montreal, Quebec area, and he added that the equal exchange rate would further encourage Canadian travelers to all areas south. Mr.

Connors noted a de-emphasis on the areas comprising the NY Boroughs as those residents without cars were less likely to travel north. He reported that Optimum Select would begin running on May 3, 2010. Mr. Connor apprised that beginning this year all network stations would have Lake George area banners on their websites, and Six Flags New England would run a Lake George campaign from June 15 to July 15. The ad, he said, would run on monitors in wait line areas and he noted the average wait time of 25 to 35 minutes. Mr. Connors noted that a major email blast went to the Six Flags New England database of 100,000 recipients. He stated that by comparison he commended Warren County Tourism Department for their impressive database of 102,000. Additionally, he stated, 5' x 3' posters would be placed within view in wait line areas throughout the park which offered two new key elements, one of which was a text message from which an individual could gain immediate access to the Lake George landing page to obtain free travel packages. He noted that the landing page could also be accessed by dialing 313131. He stated his goal to build a new database of cell phone numbers. The second feature, he said, was the quick response code noted on the poster to which individuals could hold specific cellular devices up to the poster to gain immediate access to the Lake George landing page. Mr. Conover validated the fact that a paper ad could immediately transport an individual to an audio visual medium via a cellular device. Mr. Girard added that instant text was also useful for obtaining pertinent news, such as weather.

Mr. Merlino extended privilege of the floor to Andrew Gottehrer, Area Senior Sales Manager for Interstate Hotels & Resorts Co., who stated that his mission was to create a partnership between Albany, NY and the Adirondack region where a wide range of groups, such as tour operators, bus tour incentive directors, and high school clubs, would supplement Warren County's effort to promote tourism by steering visitors in the Albany region to the Upstate NY region. Additionally, he stated, Albany could serve as the stopover site by which to capture more business en route to Upstate NY. His goal, he stated, was to supplement Ms. Brand's efforts, and to address various travel groups who would stay in Albany for a portion of their trip, and move northward to the Adirondack region for the remainder. Ms. Brand noted that the goal was to encapsulate the area between Montreal and New York City as a region for the mutual referral of business. Mr. Strainer asked how many people constituted a group and Mr. Gottehrer expounded that he preferred not to restrict group sizes which could include individual travelers and both large and small groups. Therefore; he said, any size group would be accommodated and steered to the right venues based on their need and size.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Luisa Craige-Sherman, Warren County Council of Chambers, who stated that the monthly dinner was hosted by the Lake Luzerne Chamber of Commerce recently. She thanked Messrs. Merlino and Thomas for attending and she noted that the speaker was the founder of the newly launched Adirondack Folk School in Lake Luzerne. She declared that the Folk School had been a challenging and worthwhile project which gained considerable momentum in a short period due to support from the Town and Mr. Merlino. She added that the Adirondack Folk School offered hoteliers the opportunity to package a unique stay.

Ms. Craige-Sherman announced that the next dinner would be hosted by the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce on May 20, 2010 at the Grist Mill Restaurant. The June dinner, she stated, would be held on June 17 in Hague with details to follow. She reported that the subcommittee of the education group was finalizing a June hospitality seminar and a flier would be available soon. Ms. Craige-Sherman expressed her agreement with Mr. Conover's statement of support for a link for the ARCC member businesses to access the survey results. She underscored the need for businesses to stay current with the information necessary for marketing and packaging. Warren County, she said, had better access to obtain those statistics. She suggested that the Tourism Department utilize the Tactical Assistance Center located on the State University of New York (SUNY) Plattsburgh campus, a resource from which to obtain information regarding the crafting of survey questions.

In support of the thousands of local businesses in the region, Ms. Craige-Sherman stated the need for educational opportunities for local businesses to familiarize with cutting-edge technology. She urged the Committee to consider bi-annual or quarterly meetings available to local businesses within our region, which would include the latest trends in advertising in order to attract more business, in consideration of limited budgets.

Ms. Johnson noted that the link to the survey results had already begun appearing in the Tourism Department quarterly newsletter and she had approached the Regional Tourism Council relative to planning an information seminar for local businesses.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Mr. Kenny and seconded by Mr. Belden, Mr. Merlino adjourned the meeting at 11:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joanne Collins, Legislative Office Specialist